

BREAKING DOWN AND BREAKING OUT: BECKETT'S 'ABSOLUTE LIMINALITY' IN THE THIRD AGE OF CAPITALIST TRAUMAS

PAULO DOMENECH ONETO

Escola de Comunicação, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)
Departamento de Fundamentos

Beckett's 'Absolute Liminality'

What makes our times particularly traumatic? In what way can they be considered a by-product of capitalism in its contemporary stage? How can Samuel Beckett's (1906-1989) art – here mainly understood as a creation of language – respond to the traumas of our age and point to an escape from the civilization patterns of this capitalist society?

This paper intends to trigger off a discussion of just a few of those issues through a study of two of Beckett's texts in prose (*The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing*) and two plays (*Endgame* and *Happy Days*), all written more than fifty years ago.

The hypothesis at stake is that Beckett's texts not only offer a diagnosis of the causes of our modern / postmodern / hypermodern emotional stress but also provide a response to them, which paradoxically consists in pushing the limits of our world (called 'informational', 'communicational' or 'cognitive') in crisis still further. First point: there would be *three traumatic ages in capitalism*. The first age of traumas came with the first two World Wars, strongly marked by capitalism in its imperialistic stage according to Lenin's term (*Imperialism, the Higher Stage of Capitalism*, 1917). The second one would have come with the decolonization period (thus in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the earth*, 1961), and the micropolitical upheavals of the 1960's. Finally, after the end of the geopolitical-ideological polarization (Soviet Union vs. Capitalism), we seem to have entered a third age,

which includes various factors: 1) ideological impasse of the Leftist movements; 2) growth of Islam conceived as a kind of counter-discourse of threat and/or resistance against the so-called 'values of Western societies'; 3) Post-Fordism – featuring the phenomena of outsourcing services and costs –, with an intensification of what French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called *decodification and deterritorialization of flows* (*Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, Capitalism and Schizophrenia I and II, 1972 and 1980).

Second point: Samuel Beckett presents both his characters and their means of dealing with reality as precarious ('breaking down') and also language-blocked, as if it were necessary to attain a *minimal* level in order to see beyond. The experimentation of limits is more than just an experimentation of human condition. It can also be connected with the capitalist subject, according to Deleuze and Guattari: 'capitalism tends with all its forces to produce the schizophrenic as subject of decodified flows (...), more capitalist than the capitalist and more proletarian than the proletariat' (Deleuze and Guattari 1972, 41). The so-called human condition is so depicted in terms that perfectly fit in the kind of subject that capitalism has been producing since mid-20th century. Far beyond the postmodern questions involving metanarratives, intertextuality etc., Beckett is in fact exploring the basic idea that experience is always reshaped by language, and by a decodified language to which capitalism has been evolving. In this sense, one can say that his efforts to test the limits of language are part of a strategy to cast us on the *liminal* (and minimal) zone – a zone from which another insight about our condition can emerge ('breaking out').

One can even say that Beckett's liminality is 'absolute' because it consists of a form of radical 'subtraction' (to use French philosopher Alain Badiou's terminology, *Beckett: l'incroyable désir*, 1995) leading towards extreme deprivation or precariousness. Once confronted with situations of physical-mental handicap, and with linguistic limitations to utter them, we (readers and spectators of Beckett) find ourselves in an uncomfortable position of impotence, which seems to go hand in hand with the experience of capitalism in its communicational era. Beckett's strategy is to make us reach a *point of no return* where compromising with old solutions and consolations is no longer possible. Or, at least, we cannot cling to them in good consciousness anymore.

Freud, Artaud, Beckett

What is exactly the general trauma of our times? What are its causes? How do they appear in Beckett's texts?

A provisional answer to these very broad and difficult questions can be found through a brief Freudian analysis of the concept of 'trauma' and a comparison between Beckett and another writer (Antonin Artaud) who undertook a similar descent into the hell of our limits.

Roughly speaking, in traditional psychoanalytic terms, a trauma results from the *breaking through* of powerful excitations to which our psyche responds with an ‘anticathexis on a grand scale’ (Freud 1953-1974, 29). ‘Cathexis’ is a technical term to designate the storage of emotional energy (quantities of excitation) necessary for the psychic apparatus to produce discharges and thus allowing a passage from one ‘threshold’ to another – a constant reinsertion of the pleasure principle in the domain of reality. If the level of cathectic energy is not high enough to react to a counter-investment, what is simply painful becomes traumatic. The development of anxiety is nothing but an anticipatory anticathexis whose function is to protect the whole system from trauma. From this point of view, to recollect painful events is fundamental to enabling us to attain a better balance of opposite drives (life and death). The repetition of a ‘bad’ excitation through memory triggers off an unpleasant feeling, but that is also the way the ego can be enriched by a combinatory operation of drive and repression which ultimately makes the psychical apparatus able to produce a retrospective discharge (act of mourning).

Even without discussing the shortcomings of what Freud calls the ‘principle of reality’ (spoiled by the dual model of his drive theory), one can say that a trauma always reveals the dead end of the pleasure principle. Any investigation of the causes of our modern / postmodern / hypermodern trauma should then start with an inquiry concerning the main goals that modernity under capitalism has assigned to itself and the way it deals with them, since they translate our idea of pleasure and how we attempt to make it real. The problem is not to know whether modern expectations can or cannot be fulfilled but rather to understand the degree of psychological flexibility that modern age is able to achieve.

It is in this context that the case of Artaud is instructive. Like Beckett, the French poet and playwright also looked for new forms of relationship with the world. What seems interesting, though, is that he not only suffered resistance but also tried to turn his own self into a stage for this conflict. His final verdict of modern Western civilization was finally quite tough. It appears in *The Theater and Its Double* through the affirmation that the ‘truly accursed thing’ is that we keep ‘dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames’ (Artaud 1958, 13).

In such a strong statement one finds the symptoms of modern trauma in the third age of capitalism. Human creations have lost their material, existential basis. They look rather arbitrary, unnecessary, and to a large extent *empty*. At a certain point in technological development the urgency for creating or receiving other people’s creations tends to disappear. In Nietzschean terms one could say that ‘Man’ has become unable to create his own values, for what he creates often remains weak in front of canonical forms preserved by habit. The trauma lies in the fact that modernity is also an age of information. The third traumatic age of capitalism is cognitive in the sense that there is the predominance of immaterial resources over other forms. It is true that more and more people have access to many different

sources of creation. But we *know* that all creations cannot *mean* much in terms of promoting substantial changes in our way of life. The 'system of objects' (to borrow sociologist Jean Baudrillard's expression) is always ready to take over any poetic creation. All significant changes remain individual, non-related, non-shared. All exchanges happen solely through a series of previous, controlled, predictable, and moral series of mechanisms. They can be close to the conventions of a religion for instance, but they can never be *mythical*.

The permanent modern negation or post(hyper)modern recycling of those created forms mentioned by Artaud is nothing but a reflex of our impotence to live them. To put the causes of the trauma in simpler terms: they derive from a mixture of self-satisfaction with what one has hitherto obtained in material terms and a deep conscious / unconscious disbelief that new creations can mean anything besides manipulation of the world. The causes for that can be related to a mix of *capitalistic narcissistic self-satisfaction* with what humankind has so far obtained in material terms, and to a deep conscious or unconscious disbelief that knowledge can mean more than just technological manipulation of the world (schizophrenic dynamics). We think of history as 'over', at least for the most part (Francis Fukuyama's thesis). We think that we know what knowledge is all about, precisely because of our blind confidence in history.

Some already know Artaud's response to this apathy concealed under historical agitation and craving for novelty. It basically consists of an attempt to renew the mythical sources of our language and actions. Through a radical experience involving orality and 'mise-en-scène', in literature and theatre, Artaud aimed to bring us back to the core of creation. His strategy is a strategy of transgression, to force the limits of what civilization has implicitly assigned to our spheres ('the realm of the possible') in order to reconcile man with life and allow him to make true sense. As already suggested, Beckett's reaction is different from Artaud's. Even if both artists raise the one and same issue of liminality, they do so in almost opposite although complementary ways. Instead of declaring an open war against writing or the formal usage of words, Beckett excels in creating a new type of interior monologue which stresses not only the hesitations of the narrator but also debunks its position of enunciating subject. Instead of the Artaudian effort to inscribe shouts and breaths into poetry, one finds a long syntax of variations based on enumerations and shifts in narration, which correspond to the two first language innovations mentioned by Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze 1992, 66).

Beckettian *language I* is a language of names (labels for objects). Its goal is to exhaust the very possibility of naming things (*exhaustion of reference*). Language II is a language of voices that tends to silence inasmuch as it strives for an impossible last word (*exhaustion of narration*). In both cases language relates to something exterior, objects and their combinations on the one hand, narrative voices and their flow on the other.

Language II is at stake in Beckett's *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing*. But according to Deleuze, there is a third language that applies more to the plays. It is

a language of images whose limits are immanent, in the sense that its discontinuity is found through *complete exhaustion*. In *language III* words, voices and images are brought together within a disconnected space of pure intensities where everything seems to disintegrate. Instead of a theater of ‘cruelty’ based on the idea of an over-excitement of the audience’s senses (Artaud), one finds a theater of ‘crudity’ – the etymology being the same (from the Latin *crudor*) – where the spectator is rather puzzled than aggressed by permanent situations of suspension (*stasis*). In any case, the experience of a radical break is no less intense in Beckett than in Artaud, as my brief analysis of *Endgame* and *Happy Days* will hopefully reveal.

In short, Artaud’s violent assault (a true ‘breakthrough’) into the limits of the world is replaced by a different strategy. Instead, Beckett incorporates all linguistic, logical, ethical and political functions of our world and then proceeds to an exhaustive ‘testing’ of them. It is through these tests that a process of decomposition (‘breakdown’) finally takes place forcing us to go over our traumas with a different mind, offering an occasion for ‘mourning’. Yet, Beckett’s art is in no way less political than Artaud’s because of such incorporation. The minimal space created by an ‘exhaustion of the possible’ (to use Deleuze’s terminology again) can actually be understood in terms of what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls ‘camp’ – the hidden political paradigm of our times (Agamben 1998, 47). This paradigm depends on capitalism in spite Agamben’s generalization into history as history of exclusion.

The Unnamable and Texts for Nothing

In the period from 1947 to 1953 Beckett wrote three books that are nowadays considered, according to most of the critics, his highest achievement in prose fiction. The so-called trilogy includes *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. A similar principle of self-disintegration seems to animate the three texts. Yet, if in *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* we are confronted to the traumatic situations of a vagabond (Molloy) and a moribund (Malone), in *The Unnamable* something different occurs. The whole action takes place in the narrator’s mind. It is not even an action since the coordinates that would allow the reader to situate him have disappeared, as the first lines show: ‘Where now? Who know? When now?’ (U 3) As Maurice Blanchot observes, we never come to know who this tireless ‘I’ is, or what he is exactly trying to do. On the one hand, he keeps talking, arguing in a circular way, producing utterances without a proper beginning or end. On the other, he seems to be very concerned with the whole situation, he is quite demanding, starving for some kind of meaning (Blanchot 1979, 116).

Since the first page, the narrator is torn between saying something essential about himself and giving up, because after all he is not even sure about who is doing the talk: ‘I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me’. (U 3) After admitting that the enterprise is hopeless and that he cannot speak, he paradoxically con-

cludes: 'And at the same time I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never'. (U 4) As the novel progresses this insurmountable narrative conflict only increases. As the narrator announces the presence of Malone and Molloy's voices inside his speech the tension attains a peak. The real conflict is between language and the self, the ultimate questions being: Who is talking behind the narrator? Can he say his self with words or not? If he cannot, why does he keep talking?

The safest point of departure to answer these questions lies in the narrator's comments on himself as subject of enunciation and enunciating subject. He decides to pay more attention to himself because he will be sooner or later reduced to it (U 15). This reveals the reason why he speaks. The goal is to say oneself. By speaking he will eventually find himself. However, he has already said that this is hopeless. Why does he keep talking then? Paradoxically enough, one can say that the narrator feels the obligation to speak with the voice of others in order to silent these very voices: 'I have no voice and must speak'. (U 26) It is a huge effort whose hidden goal is to conceal or to fix his emptiness as a subject, his lack of coordinates. Beckett points here to one of the problems of our times (*the absence of coordinates*) but does not provide any solution. On the contrary, he pushes the situation to a dead end. The narrator is lost, drowned, suffocated (U 170) by the worn out words that speak through him. That's all he got. He speaks to attain silence, to forget his own void. Nevertheless, this means that he is doomed to speak endlessly, to deal with this strange self of which he cannot know much.

If the 'I' of the narrator stops he will discover that there is probably no 'I'. He will find that the overwhelming murmur of others perseveres. He will be left with Mahood's voice, a master-voice (U 32). He will find emptiness. Mahood is a character who probably stands for a general voice ('manhood'): 'his voice is there, in mine, but less, less. And being no longer renewed it will disappear one day, I hope, from mine, completely. But in order for that to happen I must speak, speak'. (U 29) The disappearance of Mahood's voice would mean the triumph of absolute silence, the moment to be finally alone with his self. However, this is impossible precisely because the narrator needs to go on talking, trying to exhaust the words with words. The end of the novel shows the absolute limit attained. The narration shifts from the first to the second person in a futile attempt to encourage and find the narrator's self, a self that perhaps does not exist. We are in an impasse. Either he stops and loses his self in the void, or he goes on and loses his self in the middle of other voices.

You must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as they are any, until they find me, until they say me... perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on. (U 179)

Texts for Nothing is his attempt to find a solution for the impasse. Sitting on a sort of plateau the narrator in Text 1 reminds us of the situation at the end of *The Unnamable*: ‘Suddenly, no, at last, long last, I couldn’t any more, I couldn’t go on. Someone said, You can’t stay here. I couldn’t stay there and I couldn’t go on’ (TN 75). He explains that he is in fact much more than just tired. He is *exhausted*, unable to create any new possibility for himself. He is ‘down in the hole the centuries have dug’ and listens ‘the same thoughts’ (TN 76). Now he is willing to try again, to look for a way to establish new connections between words and himself. He scorns those who think this is impossible: ‘I can do nothing anymore, that’s what *you* think’. (TN 75, my italics)

Throughout the thirteen texts narration shifts but the question of finding a new space for the self in language, in the middle of other voices, remains. The word ‘nothing’ in the title is far from having any nihilistic connotation as the theorists of an absurd Beckett can think. It probably refers to ‘nothing useful’, ‘nothing in particular’, ‘no coordinates’. All negations become relative even if the limits are absolute, as in text 11: ‘Name, no, nothing is namable’ (TN 127). But, ‘No, something better must be found, a better reason, for this to stop, another word, a better idea, to put in the negative, a new no, to cancel all the others, all the old ones that buried me down here, deep in this place’. (TN 130-131) All narrators in *Texts for Nothing* are thus concerned with the same question of how to continue from now on. They fully recognize the importance of exhausting the words. In this sense, they are still in a situation where one must not stop. They also admit the possibility of failing the mission. The novelty is that they now refuse to fall into a new kind of habit. Moreover, they are attentive to avoid justification of failure through words. The purification of language is thus carried a little further. The former situation of impasse becomes a state of suspension (a *stasis*) from which something new can emerge. The conclusion of text 9 represents the best example of this different attitude towards the voices that speak in and through us: ‘There’s a way out there, there’s a way out somewhere, to know exactly where would be a mere matter of time, and patience, and sequence of thought, and felicity of expression’. (TN 121)

Even if the narrators are in a similar position of the unnamable being of Beckett’s trilogy, their understanding of language is not the same. As the ending of the last text (13) reveals, a space has been excavated between the temptation of silence and the overpowering torrent of worn out words. Out of the impossible voice, in the midst of silence, emptiness and darkness, a being will eventually be born: ‘when all will be ended, all said, it says, it murmurs’. (TN 140) The very last word cannot be found, but there is no need for it. One keeps talking, but no longer out of denial. The reaction has turned into *stasis*. A precarious balance between language and self has been attained. The possible has been exhausted through words. The words themselves have been exhausted. But this state of aphasia was a minimum to be attained. What else has to be exhausted before we are able to stop playing the same modern capitalist games of denial?

Endgame and Happy Days

The two plays written by Beckett in 1955 and 1961 (*Endgame* and *Happy Days*) are also to be viewed as complementary. Thematically they seem indeed closely related. But unlike in the case of the fictional texts analyzed above, they form a true sequence as if the symbiotic relationship between Winnie and Willie in *Happy Days* was just a radicalization of the master-slave symbiosis between Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*. The problem of finding the last word through constant narration recedes as we approach the universe of language III, the language of images (Deleuze 1992, 73). The limits are now immanent. They manifest themselves in the precarious physical, mental, and spatial conditions of the characters. The question of language becomes existential: how to make sense of what is happening to me and around me when I am blind, handicapped, a slave, a person sinking in the ground? It is also an ethical and political issue. Here, instead of exhausting the 'realm of the possible' by exhausting names or voices Beckett exhausts the very presence of the characters in the theatrical space.

There are four characters in *Endgame*. Living each in two ashbins covered with an old sheet are Nagg and Nell. In the same bare room, sitting in an armchair, there is their son Hamm who dresses like a king or cardinal and happens to be paralyzed and blind. Finally, there is his servant Clov. The outline of a plot is given by their names. Both Nagg and Nell are almost dead but the former represents much more a 'source of annoyance' than his wife who is 'certainly not' (E 55-56). Hamm is always 'overplaying' the role of authority. Clov is the one who represents a possibility of 'passing through' the situation to survive the 'game'. And yet, he has problems to emancipate from Hamm's orbit. 'HAMM: You're leaving me all the same. CLOV: I'm trying'. (E 6) 'HAMM: Why don't you finish us? CLOV: I couldn't finish you'. (E 37)

The setting is the setting of a *stasis*, time zero (E 4), emptied space (E 29), one single act. As a dialogue between Clov and Hamm clarifies, there is no more nature but they still breathe, change, lose hair, teeth, bloom, and ideals. As a cruel master, Hamm is the one who is reactive towards the situation, contributing to it, complaining about it, blaming his father for his misery (E 10). Clov's skepticism is different. If it is true that he does not keep illusions about meaning – 'You and I, mean something! Ah that's a good one!' (E 33) –, he is not bitter either. Even if he cannot think of any instant of happiness in his life (E 62) he still dreams of some order, some silence 'under the last dust'. (E 57) He is the one who wants to stop the 'game' or finish with it altogether (full *stasis*). To end the game is not to find a cure for their pains. It is not to assume the so-called 'absurdity of existence' either. The Beckettian 'no' never points to any solution, it less constitutes a moral judgment about life: 'the only solution is death', 'I never agreed with the notion of theater of absurd. For there is already a moral judgment in it' (Juliet 1999, 19 and 35). Clov's statement that 'the end is terrific' (E 48) sounds rather like a negation *to the way they have been reacting to their precarious situation*. This is the game.

This is what bothers Clov. Thus, after asking why he always obeys Hamm, and getting 'out of compassion' as an answer, he moves in search of their telescope while saying, 'I am tired of our goings on, very tired' (E 76). The passage clearly refers to the old Beckettian impasse between staying and going on, found in *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing*. And indeed, as Clov finally leaves Hamm and his human, all too human 'game' – which is not going to end anyway – he has at least attained a level of *stasis*. He has gone through extreme exhaustion. He is now ready for true (because without compromise) bare life, even though he is too old to form new habits, 'I say to myself – sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you... When I fall I'll weep for happiness' (E 80).

Even if there is no one punishing the old couple of *Happy Days*, and no weeping either, one should see this play precisely as an apprenticeship in suffering. It is also as a silent fight for a new understanding of happiness. Like in *Endgame*, the characters (Winnie and Willie) live in extreme precarious conditions. Their names also say a lot. They tell us about victory and about the state of our will. The play is now divided into two acts. Winnie is buried up to her waist in the first half. As Act Two begins, she is imbedded up to the neck. Once again, this sinking situation is not a metaphor for the 'absurdity of existence'. Instead, Winnie's burial is a reminder of the tragic aspect of life. As in the case of almost all Beckettian characters, Winnie has a clownish appearance. Lying asleep on the ground but close to her hole, there is Willie, her moribund husband.

From the very beginning it is clear that Winnie's 'victory' – in the sense of an escape or a revival of the old days of youth – is blocked. Nonetheless, she seems quite joyful, trying to convince herself that life is beautiful, 'Another heavenly day... can't complain, no no, so much to be thankful for, no pain, hardly any... ah yes, many mercies, great mercies, prayers perhaps not for naught'. (HD 8, 11-12) Winnie's effort consists in keeping a positive attitude towards the events, but such a strategy actually implies denial more than anything else since she never makes any real attempt of active resistance throughout the play. At the most she thinks of praying, as in the end of act one (HD 48). She basically relies on her memories and habits to believe that the days are happy. As the play progresses the title-phrase reveals itself a mere cliché. And yet, there seems to be some truth in her tragicomic *carpe diem* attitude.

One of the most important elements of *Happy Days* is Winnie's relationship with objects (parasol, mirror, toothbrush etc.) and words, which parallels her own physical collapse. In Act One she tries to avoid awareness of their deprived state by constantly rummaging her bag as she talks to herself or to Willie. But in the following act she is left alone with words. She does not open her bag anymore. Only the parasol and a revolver remain as an indication of two ways out (self-protection or suicide). By avoiding awareness or an action contrary to her sinking, Winnie becomes more firmly trapped in her hole. But as the play approaches its end, once confronted with Willie's gleeful and enigmatic expression, she turns her narrow space into a

liminal space of *stasis*, into a disconnected space of pure emotional intensities. The situation of suspense created by Willie's image 'on all fours', 'dressed to kill' (approaching the gun) suggests a different state of Will, another interpretation for Win (victory). Now Winnie's happy expression is off. Nonetheless, her self-denial and condescending attitude towards Willie have also vanished. They smile at each other (*HD* 64). Despite her more critical situation, Winnie looks freer than before – free and still paralyzed, but paralyzed by a vision that can be seen as political. Micropolitical. It may be a vision of precariousness as subtraction from a model of happiness, or a way of life with possibilities given in advance.

Micropolitical conclusion: Becoming-minoritarian in the 'Camp'

Beckett's art is to be viewed as an art of *stasis*. But the static position to which all characters and utterances tend always occurs 'beyond good and evil', in a space of absolute liminality whose foremost function is to put all positions into question (or at least within 'brackets'). In this sense, the texts and plays studied in this paper are far from being nihilistic. The 'breaking down' is the occasion for a silent and regressive 'breaking out'. The Artaudian 'scream' was the psychodramatic treatment of our traumas (a schizophrenic 'breaking through'). Beckett brings us a sort of psychoanalytic silence (a obsessive neurotic 'breaking out'). Insofar as the Beckettian characters and use of language reflect crises of identity, dilemmas of representation and similar issues, one can say that the exhaustion of possibilities in the new space refer to the modern (post and hyper) mind in particular.

In such a context, the *minimal / liminal* space must also be interpreted as a political space. It functions as Giorgio Agamben's 'camp'. According to the Italian philosopher, what our modern societies have been producing in the last hundred years at least is 'bare life', an irreducible threshold zone between biological and social life – human life and its possible inclusion or acceptance in the space of political powers (Agamben 1998, 181). Perhaps one of the merits of Beckett's minimalism is to reveal the existence of this new ethical-political paradigm, which is disguised under the old modern rhetoric of 'democracy and human rights' – a literary aspect that we attempt to ignore for the sake of our traumatized minds defended narcissistically, unable to deal with the events.

To be sure, Agambean camp is like a 'breaking down' zone where all institutional possibilities have been cancelled. Those who are trapped in it live between total annihilation and judgments emanating from constituted powers. In a camp situation – like the one of the Syrian refugees trying to enter Europe nowadays – the constituting power (the political 'possible') does not exhaust itself in sovereign

power (State). It is not bound to be represented by other constituted powers (institutions) either (Agamben 47-48). The liminal position becomes absolute. Following the clues given by Beckett, we can now go the other way round: it is the possibilities given within the frame of sovereign power that must be exhausted by the precarious people from the outside.

In our days, the powerless refugees and other minorities watch the destruction of everything around them in the name of peace and security – in the name of what they are supposed to conquer according to modern institutions and sovereigns. Crushed between death and what part of Western society calls ‘freedom’ (their political ‘possible’ officially assigned), they incarnate the limits of our systems of political representation in the same way Beckett’s characters do, on a metaphysical-existential level. Like the lives of other minorities in times of crisis, the Syrian refugees’ lives are ‘sacred’ – which means they can eventually die, but they cannot be sacrificed (Agamben 1998, 133). *Make live and let die* – that seems to be the *motto* of our biopolitical times, to use Michel Foucault’s terminology. In the case of the Syrian refugees, our hopes that something (maybe new forms of constituting power) – beyond those that Badiou has called the New Trinity (Businessman-Military-Missionary) – may come into being risk to die once again.

However, if we think of Deleuze-Guattari’s key-concept of becoming-minoritarian, we can resist by the very means of precariousness as subtraction from patterns. We can see Beckett and his strategy of ‘absolute liminality’ as a way to unmask modern capitalist hypocrisy of global communication and discover the Syrian refugees and all crushed people of any period of history as *the subtraction that we need* for making a difference in our lives, allowing new modes of existence and the becoming-political (inclusion) of everyone: ‘becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming minoritarian’. But ‘It is important not to confuse “minoritarian,” as a becoming or process, with a “minority,” as an aggregate or a state’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 356).

In other words, it is not the fact of being oppressed that can make a group of people minoritarian, but rather the fragile condition of being a process, this condition of appearing as a nondenumerable set in the middle of axiomatic capitalism where everything must find its place in consumption (Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 588). A precarious subject is politically a multiplicity, $(n - 1)$, keeping in itself the secret of subtraction, breaking down only on their way to break out, as Beckett’s characters and language. In short, Beckett’s art of exhaustion can be now seen at the service of a micropolitical movement of resistance. Once we resist in life, we are also ready to counter all life models of exclusion, all possibilities as given in advance. By exhausting these possibilities, new ones can emerge. ●

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